

Uniformity and variation in computer-mediated communication: Twitter styles of *The Real Housewives*

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This project quantitatively analyzes the Twitter posts of cast members of *The Real Housewives*, a popular reality television franchise on the Bravo network (Copple Smith, 2012). The series stars middle-aged women living affluent lifestyles in six regionally distinctive locales: Orange County, Beverly Hills, New York City, New Jersey, Atlanta, and Miami. In terms of social personae (Agha, 2003), Housewives are both uniform and heterogeneous. They project a shared persona that centers on femininity and eliteness, yet each cast is distinctive in its regional and cultural orientation. Housewives thus constitute a group of speakers through which it is possible to explore the social, regional, and idiolectal factors underlying written English styles in computer-mediated communication (CMC), and the features that cluster together in constructing sociolinguistic styles online (Eckert, 2012; Bamman et al., 2014).

To investigate the social and linguistic dimensions of stylistic distinction among these speakers, I collected a >1.15 million-word corpus of tweets from 40 cast members of *The Real Housewives*, encompassing the current six regional casts. Treating each individual's tweets as a sub-corpus, I tabulated the relative frequency of a set of 16 lexical/orthographic features known to vary in CMC (including emoticons, initialisms, abbreviations, and laughter variants). These individual frequencies were submitted to a multivariate principal components analysis to determine the association between features and individuals. Together, the first two principal components account for 36.86% of variance in the data.

Within casts, the Atlanta cast is the most variable and includes one major outlier for the whole dataset. The Beverly Hills and New York City casts also have wide dispersion between members. That is, individuals in these three casts are at least somewhat stylistically diverse. By contrast, individuals in the New Jersey, Miami, and Orange County casts are grouped closely together and are thus stylistically more uniform. Rather than clear stylistic differences between casts, casts vary in the degree of heterogeneity across individuals within them, with some casts being more uniform and others being more variable. These results are interpretable in light of the demographic composition of the different casts and the degree of similarity/difference between cast members as they are represented on the TV shows.

Finally, I will present analysis of which clusters of lexical/orthographic features drive these stylistic patterns: notably, *lol* versus *haha* and *xo* versus *xx*. These features have stereotypical indexical associations with femininity. Thus, the features that seem to most strongly drive relative degrees of stylistic similarity in CMC among the women are those that relate centrally to their identities as projected on TV.